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ABSTRACT

As a background for recommendations made in this paper on the program of regional educational laboratories, three contextual facts are highlighted. The first is the increasingly prominent role and responsibility of the individual states in the definition and delivery of elementary/secondary education. The second is that, while historically public education has been governed, planned for, administered, and funded based on input criteria, there is a major change across the nation toward output criteria becoming increasingly important. Implicit in this concept is increased accountability which must be defined in outcome terms. The third fact is the changing workforce requirements of the economy. The declining number of young people encompasses an increasing proportion of minority and poor youth, and schools fail to educate well a disproportionate number of those students. The nature of the economy requires a much broader array of new workers who have higher order skills. Recommendations are based on a need for universal high school graduation for all students, including those who are "at risk." A concerted national effort is called for which will utilize the research and dissemination potential of the regional laboratories, the resources of the private sector corporate expertise, and the political sophistication of chief state education officers. (JD)

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LABORATORY POLICY PAPER

POLICY PAPER ON THE PROGRAM OF REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORIES: THE PERSPECTIVES OF A CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICER

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This is one of several papers about the regional laboratory program, or functions which laboratories perform, which the Office of Educational Improvement (OERI) in the U.S. Department of Education has commissioned. The purpose of the papers is to assist planning for the 1990 recompetition of awards to operate regional laboratories. This paper has been written under contract to the U.S. Department of Education. No endorsement by OERI or the Department of Education should be inferred.

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Policy Paper on the Program of
Regional Educational Laboratories

the perspective of a former chief state school officer

David W. Hornbeck

To place what follows in context, the reader should know that I served for twelve years as the chief state school officer in Maryland, an additional five years as the deputy chief state school officer in Pennsylvania, a board member on the Council of Chief State School Officers for seven years, and its President for one. Thus, I come to this task of rendering a chief state school officer's perspective on Regional Educational Laboratories with the virtue of substantial breadth and depth of experience. (I recognize some will conclude this virtue is in fact vice in the form of bias.)

The perspective I provide is my own. Still, in shaping that perspective for this paper, I consulted with ten incumbent chief state school officers plus two other former colleagues. I included at least one chief state school officer from each of the nine laboratory regions. In at least three instances the person consulted serves, or has served, as the chairman of the lab board.

As a backdrop to the recommendations I will offer,there are three contextual facts that should be highlighted.

The first is the increasingly prominent role and responsibility of the state in the definition and delivery of elementary/secondary education in the United States. While that fundamental responsibility for public schools has always rested with the states and is evident in the constitutions of the states, it was declared to be a state responsibility in an unusually forceful way by the U. S. Supreme Court in the Rodriguez case arising from Texas. While not solely derivative of the Rodriguez decision, the state role in public school policy making continued to grow during the 70's. It was expanded most significantly in the 1980s. Governors, chief state school officers, state boards of education and state legislatures seized the initiative, setting the education agenda for the nation, increasing the funding level very substantially in many states and enacting unprecedented laws and regulations in an effort to improve education quality.

At the same time, this strong state role was encouraged at the national level by an Executive branch of government which clearly wanted the states to assume both the policy and financial responsibility for public education. This was evident in the

philosophical position articulated forcefully by the President and the Department of Education. It was also clear in the repeated attempts early in the decade to reduce federal funding significantly. The same theme has been played in a different way in the Congress where very significant responsibility has been lodged with the states in many legislative initiatives, including most prominently P.L. 94-142 and, most recently, in the significant program improvement provisions of the Chapter I reauthorization.

The fact is that law, practice, and fiscal policy, make the state the leadership level of government in public education. Or, as it has been put, Public Education is to State Government what National Security is to the Federal Government, its central responsibility.

The second contextual fact I wish to highlight is that, historically, public education has been governed, planned for, administered, and funded based on in-put criteria. We are in the midst of a major change across the nation toward output criteria becoming increasingly important.

The evidence for this shift is reflected in the emphasis on testing that has emerged since the mid-70s. This emphasis was made clear initially by a commitment in more than thirty states to competency-based testing,

frequently associated in some manner with the promotion and/or graduation of students. A few years later, in an effort to improve the quality of teachers, nearly all states turned to teacher testing as an objective, outcome-based way of measuring product. Five years ago, the Council of Chief State School Officers, in an unprecedented move,(and by an initial margin of one vote) endorsed the idea of state by state comparisons based on test data. They then launched a major assessment initiative to try to assure that such comparisons are done with integrity using instruments and focusing on subject areas within a time frame that makes sense. That idea was enhanced by the Alexander/James Commission recommendations that state by state comparisons be supported by the federal government because sound educational data revealing inter-state as well as national school performance is necessary to the nation's health and well being.

The frequent calls for vouchers or choice plans also have a strong outcome-based flavor to them. That flavor was made explicit last year in a model statute developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers which provided that at-risk students have an enforceable right to attend a "successful" school. Successful was defined in outcome terms. The model statute provided that where a school remained

unsuccessful, at-risk students were provided the right to move to another (and successful) school at the school system's expense. (I should emphasize that the Chiefs' model statute was not a choice for choice's sake plan. A form of choice within the Chiefs' model statute became an option only when the child's school did not produce a decent education.) The point, however, is not the statute. The point is the emphasis on outcomes.

The final evidence of this increasing emphasis on outcomes which I wish to offer is the current rhetorical focus on empowering teachers, principals, and others at the local school building level to make more of the important educational decisions. While some remain committed to empowerment as an end in itself, it is clear that implicit in the concept is increased accountability, and that accountability must be defined in outcome terms.

The third contextual fact I wish to highlight is the changing workforce requirements of the economy. This fact has three components. First, the nation has a declining number of young people. Second, an increasing proportion of those youth are minority, poor, and/or do not speak English as a first language. Schools fail to educate well a disproportionate number of those students. Third, the nature of our economy

requires that a much broader array of new workers have higher order skills than has been necessary before. Of the 27 million net job growth between 1972 and 1986, only three million have required only a traditional basic skill level education. Moreover, it is estimated that youth entering the job market today will change jobs six times and occupations three times. Such job and occupational mobility will clearly require a much higher set of learning skills. The capacity to think, to learn to learn, will for the first time be an economic necessity for a broad base of our citizenry, not a special reality for a small group of those we deem gifted.

These three contextual facts represent the backdrop against which I make the following recommendations concerning the regional educational labs:

First, I recommend that the federal government declare a bold clear objective toward which federal human resources research and development funds in general and education research and development initiatives in particular are directed. In the history of education or human resources research and development, we have never had a driving, powerful objective that is analogous to putting a man on the moon or eradicating smallpox or developing the atomic

bomb. The economic circumstances of the nation alluded to earlier make it imperative that we establish such an objective.

In November, 1987, the Council of Chief State School Officers unanimously approved a policy statement entitled, "Assuring School Success for Students at Risk." That statement provided the challenge when it states, "An imperative for America's 21st century is high school graduation for virtually all students."

Such a mission should become the organizing principle for the work of the labs. Indeed, I would argue that the mission should be the organizing principle for a systematic federal human resources research and development initiative. The labs, centers, technical assistance centers, and clearinghouses should clearly be a part of such a bold undertaking. However, it should extend further. The research and development work as well as data collection, for example, associated with the Labor Department's Jobs Training Partnership Act activities should be a part of this effort. A higher level of common definitions and common standards to define drop-outs, reading levels, math skills, and other data elements should be adopted. Affirmative initiatives should be undertaken to transfer research knowledge from the National Aeronautics and Space Agency and the

Department of Defense to the practical use of those seeking to increase the human resources reservoir of the nation. If there were an organized, systematic process for the transfer of technology knowledge, it could enhance the public school learning environment in many ways. Finally, I recommend as a part of this overall strategy that policies and incentives be developed to encourage the transfer of knowledge related to human resource development in the private sector research and development world to the public sector. On the one hand, I should think that some measure of technology transfer would be possible without offending the proprietary interests of the private sector. At the same time, it is estimated that more than $50 billion is spent each year in the so-called "corporate classroom." The strategies of that "classroom" may be directly applicable in the public classroom. The transfer of that knowledge, those strategies, could be very helpful. In doing so, of course, the private sector would receive a considerable return. Increasing the productivity of the public classroom will reduce the cost of the corporate classroom.

If such a bold mission were declared, it would give focus to all the questions of research. We would systematically examine various reasons for differences

in graduation rates at different high schools or in different school systems. To what degree are resources the critical variable? Teacher qualities and qualification? School governance? Classroom organization? The availability of technology? The nature of the curriculum or pedagogy? We could methodically examine the impact of parent involvement. At home. In school. In various roles. Differentconfigurations of time could be scrutinized. To what degree must we lengthen the school day? The school year? For all youngsters? Only for some? Most importantly, such inquiries would be focused and connected. Each would have the ultimate objective of virtual 100% high school graduation as the organizing principle. This fact, in turn, would make it feasible to connect otherwise disparate strands of research more powerfully. In many instances the impact would be much greater than the arithmetic sum of the parts. It would benefit in a geometric sense from the synergistic impact of such focused efforts.

If we were to embark on such a bold mission for human resources related research and development, what role for the regional educational labs? I envision their playing a role not unlike the vision of their present one. They would represent the primary connective point between the research being done in the

broader range of institutions suggested above and the elementary/secondary school delivery system. They would help define the research questions. They would serve as a conduit for the collection and dissemination of data. They would continue applied research activities.

The following are illustrations of the connective roles I envision for the labs. A lab could identify the six or eight corporate entities in a region that have the most sophisticated employee training programs and form a committee of the corporate training directors who could perform at least two roles. First, they could identify what strategies their training programs use which could be introduced into elementary, secondary, or adult education programs run by the public school systems. The corporate model may use technology more efficiently, for example, for secondary or adult basic skill development. Their methods may accomplish specific objectives (outcome oriented), in fewer days but done more intensely (change in the structure of time), using different physical settings (change in where learning takes place), monitored in part by a technician (change in who delivers instruction), employing new hardware and software (change in how instruction is delivered).

A second type of role for the lab-connected corporate training directors committee would be to identify what training programs are being run in corporate settings to develop skills which schools could or should have addressed as part of their basic mission. This connection could lead then to a deeper understanding by schools of how they must equip all young people for the jobs that will exist.

A second basic illustration of the connective role could involve a representative of each lab working with one or more representatives of the Council of Chief State School Officers in collaboration with high level personnel in the Department of Defense. Defense, of course, has a huge engagement in education. They bring to bear a technological capacity to the problems of learning unparalleled in the public school world. A Defense/Regional Lab/Chief State School Officer collaboration with appropriate support could send the product of such an effort back through the communication tracks of the labs into state education agencies for use in the schools.

A third illustration in which the lab's connective role can be demonstrated would be to have more formal communication between centers and labs. This has been a goal for labs and centers, but largely unrealized. I suggest two formal connections. Representatives of all

labs and all centers should meet for a structured exchange once a year. That could, perhaps, occur in conjunction with or as a sub-part of the annual American Education Research Association meeting. A second formal connection that should be considered is to have each lab director serve on the advisory board of a center and to have each center director serve on the board of a lab.

The lab is obviously the constant in all of these illustrations. The lab is the funnel with which much is poured from diverse research sources. The lab is then the primary connective point to the schools. The lab will interpret the schools' needs to the source of research and will translate the products of research to the schools.

Those involved in schools must play a major, if not decisive, role in these matters. They know the barriers they face. They know the learning obstacles of children. After research based answers are identified, they will not be implemented without school and school system commitment. The movement of questions, answers, information, and data into school and out of schools must be organized and systematic. That movement should be orchestrated by the labs under the direction of the chief state school officers from each region.

The second broad recommendation I offer could be a sub-part to the first, since it also involves focusing research and development activities. Our overall mission is graduation for all. However, specific attention is necessary to the content of what that means. Recommendation one points to the need to evaluate different answers to four questions: how (instructional strategies) do we teach all successfully? At what time during the day or year (when) must we teach for all students to be successful? Where are the best settings for successful teaching and learning? Who is best suited to teach under various circumstances in various places at different times if we are to be successful? But a different order of inquiry is reflected in the question of what we should teach and how all of those other questions are connected to the answer. I offer this recommendation independently of the first in order to give it emphasis.

For a number of years, the skill level reflected in "grade level performance" on nationally normed tests has tended to become our goal. It has become almost an annual ritual for superintendents across the country to wait with some degree of anxiety for the release of the results of that year's administration of the California Achievement Test or the Iowa Test of Basic Skills or

other tests judged by the public to contain the standard by which their schools are to be measured. The same phenomenon is played out up and down the school hierarchy. Frequently, in many school systems, the implicit, if not explicit, goal is to have the school system's average performance meet the national norm. The inadequacy of that goal is the point I wish to make. In the first place, the idea of either a norm or average means that a substantial number of individual students do not meet it. Thus, by definition, for a school to pursue the norm is to have a goal other than success for all.

However, the second weakness of the goal of a school achieving on average the national norm at a given grade level is the norm itself. Even if one were to translate the norm point into a criterion referenced point, to achieve it will be to achieve too little. I refer back to the contextual fact dealing with the economy. A nation in pursuit of a level of intellectual development reflected in the present norms on the various nationally normed tests is a nation in pursuit of long term mediocrity. First, as has been stated, if that's the goal and all achieve it, we will have achieved too little. Second, however, we will face the spectre of middle to upper class groups of young people achieving the higher order skills

necessary to a vibrant American economy in the 21st century. At the same time, after a frenzy of activity on behalf of "at-risk" youth, they will achieve the norm level expectations, only to discover that the gap between them and their more well-to-do peers has widened. That will be devastating for them and for the rest of us who rely on an economy requiring higher order skills by a much larger proportion of the student population than those circumstances will produce.

The point is made by examining the National Assessment of Educational Progress data. In the 1986 Writing Report Card, NAEP reports, for example, that fewer than one-third of the students assessed could, on any persuasive task, write a response judged adequate or better. Even in the 11th grade, only 28% wrote adequate or elaborated responses to the least difficult persuasive tasks. In science, in the 1988 Report Card, NAEP found that at age 17, while there had been improvement, student science achievement was still below that of 1969. And on a recent mathematics report card, while average performance has improved, the gains, NAEP finds, are largely confined to lower order skills. The nation and its schools face a very large challenge.

If we are to establish a bold mission of graduating virtually 100% of our youth from high

school, it is important that the content of achieving that goal is substantive. Thus, in addition to examining the how, when, where, and who questions, a centerpiece mission of the research and development associated with increasing our productive human resources must also be the what of education. I do not argue that the labs themselves should be the source of curriculum definition and development. However, I do recommend that such work be systematically pursued. The public school curricula must be built on the best thinking available in the sciences, math, the humanities. Appropriate content related to citizenship, principles of democracy, values and religion requires careful consideration. Health education and appropriate content for promoting physical and mental fitness needsre-examination.

Higher expectations should be reflected in the curriculum itself. The content should be developmentally appropriate and developmentally interesting to students. Today, our practice tends toward breadth rather than depth of coverage. In a world faced with information overload on the one hand and the necessity of thinking and the exercise of good judgment on the other, we need to seriously reconsider our orientation toward breadth of coverage. Thoughtfulness is a greater attribute. Understanding,

not coverage, should be the goal. Related to that consideration is the importance of integrating core elements of the curriculum. Discrete bits of information and unconnected subject matter is often relatively meaningless. We should consider the potentially greater power toward the development of higher order skills by presenting curriculum in the framework of broader themes.

There is an additional factor which is strongly related to the contextual facts set forth; the call for the bold objective for the human resources research and development community of universal graduation; and the requirements of quality curricular content. That factor is the need for increasingly rich assessment instruments, techniques, and procedures. Accountability to a demanding public is both appropriate and required. Any strong accountability initiative will shape what occurs in schools. More specifically, it will lead to an effort to "teach to the test." That is good, not bad. It simply means that we must make every possible effort to ensure that what the assessment measures is worth learning and that how the assessment is conducted at least does not interfere with what is learned (better yet if the assessment techniques actually enhance the learning).

To provide the nation's schools with a curricular base covering the content areas necessary to an informed citizenry and productive workforce in an integrated, developmentally appropriate manner with intrinsically high expectations and to be able to measure the product of learning will require a very significant research foundation that does not presently exist. That foundation will include the research related to the curriculum content itself. But it must then be connected to how it is taught, where the best learning occurs, the timeframe in which different students can best learn it, and who is most effective in deliverying it. Again, the labs provide a critical connection to the world of practice. We can neither ask the right questions, formulate responsive answers, or seek to validate them without a systematic, comprehensive, realistic connection of the research community to the school community. As suggested earlier the labs can provide that connection if they are coherently designed and governed to do so.

I wish to make one specific implementation recommendation related to broad recommendations one and two. Across the United States on a daily basis two million teachers are at work in hundreds of thousands of schools in sixteen thousand school systems. Many are successfully teaching and their students are

successfully learning. To date, we have not discovered an effective mechanism for identifying successful instructional practices measured by defensible standards, which can then be disseminated in a non-cumbersome and useful manner. The result is that we either lose valuable insight into effective practice and know-how or we subject it to such convoluted validation processes that others are unable to learn about them. Yet, the notion of "effective schooling" or "what works" has achieved at least rhetorical prominence across the nation. We even find it in legislation. For example, Chapter I requires school systems applying for funds to guarantee their SEA that their programs are "of sufficient size, scope, and quality to give reasonable promise of substantial progress toward meeting the educational needs of the children being served." Labs could support such requirements not only by identifying programs that would meet high quality standards, but also by designing evaluation techniques and studies which school systems, schools, and teachers could use to demonstrate that home grown programs work. It is fashionable to call for the empowerment of teachers and principals. That call should be supported. One way to do so would be to give teachers the tools to evaluate their efforts and to share successful efforts with

others through means sufficiently simple so as to be realistic.

I do not suggest that the labs can connect directly in a significant way with individual school systems, much less with individual schools or classrooms. However, through the state education agency, outreach into and out of local education agencies is possible and desirable.

The third broad recommendation I offer is that adecisive role in the governance of the labs be exercised by the chief state school officers in each region. If labs are to exist, and I believe they should, someone, not everybody, must make the basic policy decisions. I reach that conclusion for the following reasons.

First, if we are going to have any chance of achieving our objective of 100% graduation, there must be a focal point of leadership. Major bold objectives of the kind called for are never achieved when one operates on a lowest common denominator decision by committee basis. Thus, a governance structure composed of representatives from the ranks of school administrators, teachers, university faculty, business, and the state department of education will not function effectively unless there is a decisive source of "buck stopping" policy decision making. Someone, or some one

group must bear that responsibility albeit in consultation with others.

Second, it is important for chief state school officers to develop a vested interest in lab results. If the chief state school officer is not in a position of meaningful leadership in laboratory decision making, or worse, if the chief feels "shut out" (a situation that exists in more than one region, involving more than one state) it is not likely the chief will take the work of the lab very seriously, however brilliant that work may be.

Third, those who are accountable must also have the authority to act. It is clear that state laws, including the constitutions of the states, practice, and public perception view the state as the guarantor of public education. As noted earlier, state leadership has seized the elementary/secondary initiative in policy and fiscal terms during the past two decades. State level education leadership has demonstrated its willingness to be held accountable, even to have the product of state educational efforts compared from state to state. At the same time, that leadership needs the tools of achievement at its disposal.

One of the tools that will prove most helpful is research-based insight into policy options which must

be considered. No state, either in its state department of education nor in its universities, has the research capacity to do the job, to answer either the strategy questions of how, where, when, and who or the content question--what--with a solid research basis.

Fourth, the chief state school officers of each region should be the arbiters of lab policy in each region in contrast to other state leaders. Some may argue that the Governors of the several states in a region should decide who will be the state standard bearer. That would be a mistake. The labs are to be the connective tissue between the research generated by several sources and the schools. The Governor is not in a position to have substantive knowledge about these issues. Nor is the Governor in a direct relationship to school systems and schools, and thus, cannot effectively oversee movement into and out of schools as research is conducted and results are disseminated. The connective tissue role is not basically a political one in the electoral sense. It is a complex educational one involving a major, even a dominant, state role but a state role that must be played out against a practice in most states of local control. The office of the chief state school officer in each state is the office that most often relates to the

state political apparatus and, at the same time the local school board; teachers and administrators, as well as the organizations that represent them; parents through the PTA; the business community; and the university community.

My recommendations arise in part from conversations with twelve other incumbent or former chief state school officers consulted in the preparation of this paper. The underlying question asked of each was, "What contribution has your regional educational lab made to educational and/or school reform in your state?" The answer from each depended upon the degree to which the chief state school officer perceived that the state education agency could rely on lab support for SEA-defined priorities. In each instance in which there was generally positive feedback (five of eight, with one other in a wait and see posture due to changes in the lab recently) the lab priorities were regional as well as rooted in individual state priorities. Each sitting or former chief state school officer underlined the fact that he or she was not looking for support just for his or her own state. Each noted that to serve regional priorities is to serve each individual state if the chiefs have had a palpable role in selecting the priorities.

In contrast, it does not work from the perspective of a chief state school officer if the lab director and staff operates in the mode of a university department with lab staff as a whole or even individual lab staff effectively choosing priorities which may suit their research interests but not necessarily the needs of the people and institutions the labs are designed to serve. Neither does it function well if each constituency sitting on the board of a lab is the co-equal object of lab service. If chiefs get their share and teachers theirs, and administrators theirs, and so on, all may have been kept arguably happy, but the cumulative, focused impact of the research will have been significantly dissipated. Dissipation of effort is one characteristic the labs can ill-afford since their resources are so meager in the context of the size of their task. That fact underlines the importance of maximizing the focus of the work of the labs in the manner suggested--by declaring a mission-like objective, defining the content or major directions important to that mission, and putting the chief state school officer in charge from a policy perspective.

The structure and method of operation presently employed by Research for Better Schools (RBS) is a good example of how governance and implementation of the labs can work reasonably well.

Research for Better Schools, located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, presently serves five jurisdictions; Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, the District of Columbia, and Maryland. Maryland has been a formal part of the RBS system since 1985 when the new contracts were let. However, two years prior to that Maryland was invited to send observers to Board meetings and was the recipient of a small amount of service.

The Board of Directors is an active Board, meeting quarterly. Between meetings the Executive Committee meets monthly. The Board consists of twenty members. The five chief state school officers or their designees are members. Each chief chooses three other members from his or her jurisdiction. Those selected are to represent diverse communities including boards of education, teachers, administrators, and the broader community. But it is the chief state school officer who effectively makes the decision as to who serves as a board member from his or her state.

RBS serves regional priorities, supports state initiatives, and to a limited extent, after consultation with the state leadership, renders service directly to local school systems.

An important contribution, for example, at the regional level is a staff development design for middle

management. The five jurisdictions all recognized that their middle managers' effectiveness was crucial to their success. They also recognized that frequently individuals rising to the level of middle management had little or no relevant management experience. These issues became even more important in the context of increasing expectations of state performance, a reflection of a higher measure of accountability.

The focus of the middle management staff development initiative is at the SEA level. RBS staff meets with staff in each state in a pre-retreat conversation of preparation. A two-day retreat is then held; and, subsequently, there are follow-up activities with staff in each state. Over a period of time, this process is repeated for each of several areas of focus, including: a) planning, b) managing people, and c) facilitating versus imposing change. Given SEA staff turnover, the states and RBS expect to repeat the cycle every two to three years.

Other regional activities include projects to determine: a) how testing impacts on schools and students in the context of several variables, b) relative success with early childhood education initiatives, and c) gains in student achievement in a number of different program areas.

At the present time, the bulk of RBS activity is directed toward priorities within each state, identified by each state. Each state is assigned a coordinator by RBS. That person plus his/her superior meet each year on behalf of RBS with the SEA's representatives to negotiate the areas and activities of emphasis for the subsequent year. In the case of Maryland, the two third-ranking persons in the Department, the Assistant Deputy State Superintendents, represent the Department. Prior to meeting with the RBS staff for this purpose each year, the two Assistant Deputies consult with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Cabinet and those more directly responsible for vocational, general, special, and compensatory education. They would also, of course, consult with the State Superintendent. These conversations were always conducted within the context of formal priority setting and resource allocation at the Department. Not surprisingly, RBS activity is in direct support of the primary reform efforts underway in Maryland.

For several years, including those when Maryland participated only informally in the life of RBS, a focus was Project Basic, Maryland's very broad-based competency education program. Project Basic impacts on every Maryland student, culminating at the high school

level in a requirement that each student pass four tests (reading, writing, mathematics, and citizenship) as a pre-requisite for graduation. RBS assisted in the implementation design--how do you actually get the program to impact at the school/classroom level? The MSDE assigned one staff person full-time to each school system to assist in the implementation of Project Basic. RBS evaluated the effectiveness of such a facilitation model. Central to Project Basic's success has been the requirement that a school system provide "appropriate assistance" to any student not passing the required tests the first they are given in the ninth grade. RBS and MSDE program staff designed various models of appropriate assistance. Project Basic, after twelve years of development and implementation, is now an on-going part of Maryland's education program.

A second major commitment in Maryland several years ago was to bring to local school systems the very best research-based instructional strategies. We have done that through a program called School Improvement Through Instructional Processes (SITIP). To oversimplify, approximately two dozen candidates for selection as one of the four best instructional strategies were identified. A variety of means were then used to reduce the number to the final four. School systems were invited to send a team to hear

about the four with the understanding that each system would agree to faithfully try at least one. Within two years, all systems had chosen at least one. Hundreds of classrooms are involved. There are extensive staff development activities associated with the effort using primarily atrainer of trainers model. Over the years, additional SITIP options have been made available. Research for Better Schools has been a significant resource to this process, including, most recently, conducting a process evaluation of the model.

Maryland, as has happened in nearly every other state, has examined extensively the role and character of secondary education in the state. This examination began with a blue ribbon high school commission from which emanated dozens of recommendations ultimately receiving the imprimatur of the State Board of Education. Early in the process five high schools reflecting widely divergent student populations were selected to serve as contexts to test various policy options and in which we intended to focus subsequent evaluation activities. RBS helped Maryland design the process through which Maryland is determining the impact of the Commission's recommendations. RBS is also involved in carrying through the evaluation.

More than a decade ago, the education community concluded the principal was one of, if not the, most

important job in the education hierarchy. With a good principal, one was quite likely to have a good school; similarly, a poor principal was likely to yield an equally self-fulfilling prophecy in the school. Maryland was one of the first states to provide an extensive Principal's Academy (the Maryland Professional Development Academy). RBS is now engaged in helping the MSDE determine the impact of the Academy programs. Do schools demonstrably change? Does student achievement improve? Are results evident after one year? Two? What changes in the Academy program are called for to improve its impact on school (and student) performance?

A substantial percentage of new teachers leave teaching within five years. At a time when good teachers are at a premium, schools cannot tolerate that turn-over. One of the underlying causes many believe is the insensitive way in which we permit new teachers to come to the classroom. New teachers are given full teaching loads with little or no staff development support. Help and encouragement from other human beings, including experienced teachers, is the product of the other teacher's initiative or the new teacher's good fortune more frequently than planfulness. Maryland has embarked on a major effort to implement a beginning teacher induction process that will avoid

these mistakes. RBS is a full partner in evaluating that effort.

Eighteen months ago, Maryland's Governor launched two significant education initiatives. One was the Governor's Commission on School Performance. Its mission is to recommend to the State Board and the Governor what indicators can most sensitively tell us a school is successfully performing its mission with all its students and what assessment strategies can yield data best for those indicators. The second initiative was the Rural Schools Enhancement Project. The superintendents in Maryland's six poorest systems agreed to set several performance objectives, including: a) lowering the drop-out rate to 10%; b) increasing daily attendance to 95%; c) having 90% of their ninth graders pass the competency tests in reading, writing, math, and citizenship the first time they are given. A variety of activities are part of the project. RBS is providing important support to both of the Governor's initiatives.

Finally, the Maryland State Department of Education's most important priority is to identify governance, curriculum, instructional and staffing strategies that will work more effectively for children and youth at risk of school failure. For the past two years, most of the MSDE's activities have been crafted

in terms of how they related to that priority. RBS has again played a major role. They have conducted and maintained a survey of the literature to help ensure that Maryland does not miss what others have learned; they have worked with both LEAs and the SEA to summarize present activities, since one of the major challenges is to use present resources most effectively; they drafted a major plan of action for the Maryland State Board of Education related to serving Maryland's at-risk student population.

A centerpiece of Maryland's at-risk initiative is Maryland's Task Force on At-Risk Children and Youth. Maryland was one of eleven states to receive a grant from the Council of Chief State School Officers (funded by the Department of Labor) to design a piece of legislation which would guarantee children and youth at risk of school failure the education and related services reasonably calculated to lead to high school graduation. Research for Better Schools is providing important support to that effort.

I have described Maryland's experience with Research for Better Schools at some length because I think the way in which RBS/Maryland operates represents a model through which the generic recommendations I have made could be implemented successfully. The RBS/MSDE major elements are: a) student achievement as

a clear focus; b) priorities with improved instruction as central; c) chief staff school officers in charge.

However, replicating the RBS/Maryland experience alone will not do the job. In setting our course we did not have any sense of national mission. The RFP for the last round of contracts identified certain school and classroom improvement goals. But no sense of priority or urgency was attached to them.

That sense of urgency is necessary in a national context. The requirements of the next RFP must provide that direction. It can do so by a) requiring plans to relate to the recommended mission of a virtual 100% graduation rate by the turn of the century; b) requiring plans that support the idea that graduation have a connotation of a rigorous course of study; c) requiring plans that demonstrate the importance of assessment of performance with rich procedures consistent with sound instruction; d) requiring plans that demonstrate an intention to help states measure education success or failure based on outcomes.

The next RFP should require that the chief state school officers be in a decisive position. Boards should consist of a variety of constituencies, but the chief state school officer should select those from among whom board members are chosen or otherwise control the selection process.

The next RFP should require that the "connective tissue" role is understood. Applicants should be asked to illustrate how they expect to serve in that role. Some premium should be attached to how well and how imaginatively an applicant anticipates meeting this need.

American elementary/secondary education is at a crossroads. It has performed exceedingly well historically in meeting the economic/civic requirements of the nation. From the perspective of those requirements, we have had the luxury of disposable children. We did not need all to succeed. The equation has changed. We need all and we need achievement at an unprecedented high level. The Regional Educational Labs cannot do that job alone. But the role I have recommended in this paper is a necessary one which, if performed in the suggested manner, will make a significant contribution.